DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 503 SP 025 546

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TITLE When Teachers Speak, Teacher Educators Listen: For Relevance in Teacher Education.
PUB DATE Nov 84
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Mid-South Educational Research Association (13th, New Orleans, LA, November 13-15, 1984).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Classroom Techniques; Higher Education; *Program Effectiveness; Program Evaluation; *Program Improvement; *Relevance (Education); *Teacher Attitudes; *Teacher Education Programs; Teacher Educators; Teacher Influence
IDENTIFIERS Kentucky

ABSTRACT

A questionnaire solicited information from Kentucky-trained teachers serving in Kentucky on how relevant their teacher training was to their present situation. A 13-item questionnaire received responses from 77 teachers. Questions focused on: (1) the most beneficial and most inadequate aspects of Kentucky's teacher education programs; (2) the most prevalent academic, social, and task-related problems exhibited by Kentucky school pupils; (3) verified successful instructional and management methods and materials; and (4) important skills and coursework for practitioners. Over 80 percent of the practitioners checked student teaching and practical field experiences as the most beneficial aspects of their undergraduate program. Over 50 percent identified listening skills, written expression, study skills, and reading as prevalent academic problems of students. Classroom behavior and management skills were identified as most needed and desirable skills for teachers. Response to inquiries on teacher education courses, content, and curriculum design tended to reflect trends in teacher education, with older teachers differing from younger teachers on course content and curriculum emphasis. (JD)

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SP 025 546

WHEN TEACHERS SPEAK, TEACHER EDUCATORS LISTEN:

FOR RELEVANCE IN TEACHER EDUCATION

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At the

Thirteenth Annual Meeting of the

Mid-South Educational Research Association

November 13-15, 1984

New Orleans, Louisiana

Teacher education must be relevant to the needs of classroom teachers, and the needs of their pupils. Preservice and inservice teachers often express, through college course or program evaluation, that they desire more practical experience and readily applicable information and skills, so that they could more effectively instruct and manage their pupils. However, a lot of teacher education courses is irrelevant, unrealistic, too theoretical, and impracticable, leaving much room for improvement (Blair, 1983; Dickson, 1979; Elliot and Steinkeller, 1979; Leung, 1984; Middleton and Cohen, 1979).

Improvement in teacher education is imperative, as excellence in education is currently a national, state, and local passion (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). For the quality of public education for the young could not surpass much beyond the quality of education for public school teachers; and relevance and immediacy are indispensable ingredients of excellent teacher preparation programs. One way to enhance the relevance of teacher education is through judicious incorporation of classroom teachers' evaluation of and suggestions for realistic and meaningful teacher training programs. Such strategy is also in compliance with the standards of the National Council For Accreditation of Teacher Education (1982), which advocates student participation in program evaluation, development, modification and improvement, both at the undergraduate and graduate levels.

As teacher educators in a Kentucky university, the authors are vitally concerned about the relevance and immediacy of Kentucky's teacher education in general, and their university's in particular. Since the graduates from

Kentucky universities tend to serve Kentucky school students, relevance could be facilitated through information on what teachers perceived as 1) the most beneficial and inadequate aspects of Kentucky's teacher education programs; 2) the most prevalent academic, social, and task-related problems exhibited by Kentucky school pupils; 3) some verified successful instructional and management methods and materials in Kentucky; and 4) important skills and coursework for practitioners in the field. A questionnaire was specifically designed to solicit such information from Kentucky-trained teachers serving in Kentucky. The results could be used to identify some desirable as well as inadequate areas of the state's teacher education programs, and serve as data base for program justification, improvement and /or modification of various teacher education curricula. Meanwhile, methods and materials courses should prepare students to meet with prominant academic, social and task-related problems in the classrooms, and introduce them to some proven effective professional skills and technology.

Method

A 13-item questionnaire, with five checklist-typed questions and eight open-ended questions, is the major research instrument. It was developed from an interview schedule, designed and administered to 20 master teachers in Central Kentucky schools in Spring 1984 by the senior author, for a related research. The questionnaire was field-tested with about 100 graduate students majoring in secondary, elementary or special education during Summer 1984. The refined instrument was then mailed to a randomized sample of about 10% of Kentucky public and nonpublic schools in early September, 1984. Each building principal of the research school was

requested to distribute the questionnaires to one representative from each grade or each subject area in the school. A summary of research findings was promised to all respondents who indicated such interest in the returned questionnaires.

Results and Discussions

Out of 200 questionnaires, 77 were returned, at a rate of 39%. The sample contained 55 teachers who received undergraduate training in Kentucky, and 59 teachers who are either former or current Kentucky graduate students. (This excluded 7 special education teachers, who were discarded due to small sample size and their rather "atypical" responses which might throw the resultant picture off-balanced. A future study will be conducted on special educators only.) The breakdown statistics, based on grade-level taught, student socioeconomic condition, and years of teaching experience are presented in Tables 1, which also indicates the item numbers in the questionnaire the subgroup statistics were used. As evident from the data, statistics and related interpretation for some of the subgroups may be meaningless or misleading, because of the small numbers of respondents. Readers should use discretion in examining the following results and implications.

Table 1. Demographic Breakdown of Numbers of Respondents

Repondents	State Totals	Grade-Level Ele.	Mid.	Sec.	Student SES Rural	Urban	Yrs.of Experience 0-5	6+
Ky-Trained Undergraduates (Items 1,2)	55	32	13	10	27	28	9	46
Ky-Trained Graduates (Items 3,4)	59	35	11	11	26	29	7	51
All Teachers (Items 5-13)	70	39	15	12	31	35	12	54

The responses of Kentucky teachers to all items in the questionnaire are tabulated and categorized in the following tables and discussion. However, the tables are abbreviated, presenting only the significant data. Interested readers could obtain full tables by writing to the senior author.

Beneficial and Inadequate Aspects of Programs. Questions 1-4 requested teachers to assess the beneficial and inadequate aspects of their training programs. Over 80% of the Kentucky-trained practitioners checked student teaching and practical field experience as the most beneficial aspects of their undergraduate programs. Both the graduate and undergraduate courses on methods and materials were regarded as most beneficial by about 50% of the respondents. At the same time, congruent with other studies (Dickson, 1979; Elliot and Steinkeller, 1979; Leung, 1985; Middleton and Cohen, 1979), the most frequently criticized aspects of both the graduate and undergraduate programs were also practical experience and applicability or relevance of course content. The message seems to be that teachers did not have sufficient amount of the most valuable element of teacher education. This was especially keenly felt by the secondary education majors, whose course work tends to focus more on subject areas than field experience. Meanwhile, novice teachers (0-5 years of teaching experience) were least critical of course irrelevance but expressed need for more pre-service classroom experience at the undergraduate level, and were vice versa as they evaluated graduate programs. The recency of their undergraduate training might have accentuated their perception of redundancy of some graduate courses; whereas their relative inexperience forces them to look for practical applications of college learning. Or their less demand for more field experience could be a result of increased emphasis on field-based training in recent programs:

an indication of improvement on the part of teacher educators as well as teacher education; also a learner's verification of program effectiveness. An implication for teacher education is continuous increment of time and efforts on the practical component of all preparation programs.

A to the specific areas of inadequate training, skills in discipline and classroom management were considered the most deficient at the undergraduate level, followed by testing and assessment. At the graduate level, the most frequently identified weakness was interpersonal and public relations, seconded again by skills in testing and assessment. Perhaps teachers who are new to the classroom situation need more competencies in managing students and classroom routines, besides knowledge and instructional techniques in academic areas. More experienced teachers, especially those who were or are in graduate studies, have at least learned some management strategies through actual classroom experience, and are ready for more sophisticated skills and knowledge, as they seek to serve students in an expanded ecology and with more comprehensive structure.

Question #1: What is the most beneficial aspect of your undergraduate teacher training program?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Student teaching	83	83	77	70	73	89	89	75
Methods & materials	64	57	69	70	62	59	44	64
Practicum experience	62	60	69	60	58	70	89	55
Reading & lang. arts	53	67	31	40	35	70	78	48
Human development/ learner characteristics	49	53	54	50	42	59	55	50
Behavior & classroom management	47	43	62	40	54	37	33	45

Question #2: What is the most inadequate aspect of your undergraduate teacher education program?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
PRACTICALITY OF PROGRAM								
Not enough practical experience	42	37	38	60	35	52	44	43
Irrelevant, unrealistic course content	23	23	15	20	23	22	0	27
Classes redundant, waste of time	8	13	0	0	0	15	11	7
INADEQUACY IN SPECIFIC AREAS								
Discipline and classroom management	9	13	8	0	12	7	22	7
Testing, assessing, and follow-up	9	10	15	10	12	7	22	7
Interpersonal skills	4	3	0	10	8	0	0	5

Questions #3: What is the most beneficial aspect of your graduate teacher education program?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-6 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Methods & materials	56	66	45	27	52	64	43	59
Curriculum design & development	51	56	27	64	60	46	43	53

Question #4: What is the most inadequate area of your graduate teacher education program?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
PROGRAM IN GENERAL								
Applicability, relevance of course content	28	34	9	36	24	36	43	27
Practical experience	9	3	18	18	4	14	0	10
Redundancy; overlap with undergraduate courses	5	9	0	0	0	11	29	2
SPECIFIC INADEQUACY								
Interpersonal and public relations	9	9	18	0	16	4	0	10
Assessment of learner ability/achievement	7	13	0	0	4	11	14	6
Research methods	5	6	9	0	8	4	0	6

Current Field Demand. Questions 5,6, and 7 were designed to investigate certain aspects of the current field situation. By identifying the major classroom-related problems, perhaps teacher educators could more realistically prepare students to meet challenges in the real world, thus enhancing the relevance of teacher education programs.

In items 5, 6, and 7, teachers were asked to check the most prevalent academic, social, and task-related problems exhibited by their students. Since the focus is no longer on Kentucky teacher education programs, but the general Kentucky school situation, data from all respondents were used. Over 50% of all teachers identified listening skills, written expression, study skills and reading as prevalent academic problems among Kentucky youngsters. In the social arena, irresponsibility and over-dependence were outstanding problematic behaviors, while "following instruction" and "focusing attention" were most wanted task-related behaviors. How to facilitate learning in these areas must be the common concerns of college instructors as well as practitioners. Professors of methods and materials

courses, and practicum experiences could adjust content and emphasis along these lines, whereas practitioners could be called upon to share expertise in college classes.

Question #5: What are the most prevalent academic problems exhibited by your students?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Listening skills	73	77	73	75	79	66	50	76
Written expression	65	62	80	58	59	71	42	71
Study skills	55	56	67	50	48	66	33	62
Reading	53	44	87	42	62	43	25	58
Spelling	28	15	40	25	24	23	0	29

Question #6: What are the most prevalent social problems exhibited by your students?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Irresponsible	68	64	87	50	87	49	42	72
Over-dependent	50	54	53	33	55	46	42	49
Low self-concept	29	33	13	17	29	29	8	33
Controlling emotions	29	28	40	8	35	23	0	35
Getting along with peers	27	33	27	8	29	26	33	25
Disrespect teacher or authority	26	23	47	8	35	17	17	27

Question #7: What are the most prevalent task-related classroom problems exhibited by your students?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Following instruction	51	61	60	33	68	34	50	64
Focusing attention	45	53	40	67	65	49	33	60
Low priority for academics	37	26	60	33	48	20	25	45
Working independently	34	50	33	33	58	31	25	53

Tips For Course Content and Curricular Design. Items 8-13 solicit the practitioners' ideas and suggestion, based on their current field experiences, for possible incorporation into more meaningful and effective course and curricular content. A wide range of strategies and techniques had been employed by classroom teachers, for academic instruction in item 8, social skills in item 9, and behavior and classroom management in item 10. On the whole there s few novelty ideas practised or developed by pratitioners. Most responses reflect the trend of teacher education through the years. Older teachers tend to rely on teacher as the information giver and role model for the youngsters. Teacher personality is important in both academic and social education. The newer or younger teachers tend to depend more and more on strategies, and the behavioral technology has clearly shown its inroad on the educational scene. Some sort of rewards and punishment contingencies are often cited as effective social education and management techniques. However, there are methods shared by all teachers, such as drills and repetition for academic learning. Perhaps these are really timed-tried methods, or, perhaps, the field of education needs to develop more effective approaches through empirical studies.

Question #8: What are the most successful instructional techniques that you have used to help students master academic skills?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Drill, repetition, review	27	29	33	17	32	23	33	25
Participation activities: games, races, etc.	26	29	20	25	23	29	25	25
Hands-on experience, practical application	20	13	33	25	23	17	8	22
Individualized, on level instruction	9	8	7	17	16	3	8	9
Discussion format	9	5	13	17	6	11	0	11

Question #9: What are the most effective instructional techniques that you have used to help students acquire social skills?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
Group discussion, Class Meeting, Magic Circle	26	32	13	25	19	31	17	27
Group activities or interactions	21	16	33	25	23	20	33	18
Role-playing	14	13	20	8	16	11	8	15
Positive emotional environment	12	8	0	42	23	3	0	15

Question #10: What are your most effective behavior/classroom management strategies?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES								
Reward & punishment contingencies (Beh. Mod.)	36	45	40	17	45	31	42	35
Consistency with rules and consequence	18	13	13	42	19	17	17	18
Assertive Discipline	14	21	7	0	3	23	0	16
TEACHER PERSONALITY, BEHAVIORAL CHARACTERISTICS								
Respect, love, patience for students	14	13	20	8	10	17	0	16
Prepared, organized, in control	9	5	13	17	13	6	8	9
Expects discipline	9	5	0	33	13	6	25	5

Items #11-13 supplement items #1-4. Item #11 is designed to find out what teachers think they need to know, while item #13 what teachers want to know, even though these subject areas may not be components of their past or present preparation programs. Item #12 also supplement items #8-10. Teachers would identify programs and materials that are effective in their

instruction. This type of information does not only serve as one way of product verification, but also let teacher educators know about field-tested programs and materials of which they may not be aware. Conscientious and judicious application of such information from practitioners would indeed insure relevance in teacher education.

Responses for items #11 and #13 seem to reflect the general response patterns for items #1-4. Classroom and behavior management skills, for instance, are identified as the most needed and most desirable skills for preservice students as well as for novice teachers and seasoned veterans. Other unusual statistics could be explained in terms of subgroup characteristics. For example, mastery of subject matter is considered significant instructional competency by secondary and middle school teachers, while elementary and middle school teachers seem to rely more on communication skills for educating youngsters. And, novice teachers even regard patience and flexibility as priority "skills" for preservice students, based on, no doubt, their own relative unfamiliarity with complex and unpredictable classroom demands and learning problems.

The reponses to item #12 are overwhelming but extremely diversified. There is little concensus to "What is your favorite instruction program/material (commercial or otherwise) that you would recommend to other teacher?" The most frequently mentioned categories are "teacher-made or teacher-created materials" and "educational TV", by 9% and 6% of the respondents respectively.

By way of conclusion, attention is called to several additional features of this study, besides those mentioned previously, to facilitate proper interpretation. 1) No analysis and interpretation was made between the rural and urban samples, because the differentiation was not clear in

the questionnaire and interpretation may therefore be erroneous. 2) A close resemblance occurs between the "state totals" and the subgroup "elementary-school teachers", and between "state totals" and the subgroup "six or over years" in the categories of "grade-level taught" and "years of teaching experience" respectively, because these two groups constitute the majority in their relative categories.

Question #11: In your opinion, what is the most important skill that a preservice student should have acquired before entering the teaching field?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
HUMAN-RELATIONS SKILLS								
Discipline and classroom management	30	37	27	17	26	34	42	27
Relate to, communicate with students/adults	15	16	20	8	19	11	8	16
INSTRUCTIONAL COMPETENCIES								
Communication skills	11	11	20	0	13	9	8	11
Mastery of subject matter	9	5	13	17	10	9	0	11
PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES								
Love & interest in students	11	13	0	17	6	14	8	11
Patience	11	16	7	0	10	11	25	7

Question #13: If you can choose one college course that will help you grow as a teacher, what will you choose?

	State Totals %	Ele. %	Mid. %	Sec. %	Rural %	Urban %	0-5 yrs. %	6+ yrs. %
DISCIPLINARY AREA								
Classroom management & discipline	15	26	0	0	13	17	17	15
Counseling	3	0	7	8	0	6	8	2
INSTRUCTIONAL AREA								
Teaching reading & language arts	8	8	13	0	10	6	8	7
Teaching math	5	3	13	0	10	0	0	5
Method & materials in subject area	5	0	7	17	10	0	0	5
FOUNDATION & RELATED AREA								
Psychology: child, human, classroom	9	13	0	8	0	17	0	11
Human growth & dev.	1	0	0	8	0	3	0	2

Note: Part of these data has been presented in the 1984 Kentucky Association of Teacher Educators Fall Conference, Lexington, Kentucky, October 5-6, 1984, in a paper entitled "Suggestions From Classroom Teachers For Program Improvement In Teacher Education."

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Acknowledgement:

The authors would like to thank Dr. Robert Byrne, Director of Educational Research and Evaluation at Eastern Kentucky University, for his consultation and support in this research project.